

P 141726Z SEP 01
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3714
INFO SECDEF WASHDC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC
USCINCSO MIAMI FL
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY PANAMA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 008352

E.O. 12958: DECL: 9/12/11
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: OPERATION SEVENTH OF AUGUST WINDS DOWN

REFS: A) BOGOTA 7805 B) BOGOTA 7555

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR ANNE W. PATTERSON; REASONS 1.5 (B,D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY'S (COLMIL) "SEVENTH OF AUGUST" OPERATION, LAUNCHED ON AUGUST 17 AGAINST A 1,300 STRONG FARC FORCE IN THE EASTERN COLOMBIAN DEPARTMENTS OF GUAVIARE AND META IS WINDING DOWN. THE JOINT ARMY/AIR FORCE OPERATION WAS EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL, ESPECIALLY IN ITS EARLY STAGES, AS IT INFLICTED SUBSTANTIAL CASUALTIES ON SOME OF THE FARC'S ELITE MOBILE COLUMNS, AND LED TO THE DEATH OF "URIAS CUELLAR," THE FARC'S SECOND MOST IMPORTANT FIELD COMMANDER AND HEIR APPARENT TO "MONO JOJOY."

2. (C) SINCE THE END OF AUGUST, THE COLMIL HAS BEEN ATTEMPTING TO ENCIRCLE THE FARC COMBATANTS AS THEY RETREAT BACK TO THE FARC "DEMILITARIZED ZONE" ("DESPEJE"). THIS EFFORT HAS HAD LIMITED RESULTS FOR THE COLMIL, WITH A SMALL NUMBER OF FARC COMBATANTS SURRENDERING. HOWEVER, MOST OF THE RETREATING FARC COMBATANTS HAVE APPARENTLY BEEN ABLE TO ELUDE THE COLMIL'S ENCIRCLEMENT BY BREAKING UP INTO SMALL GROUPS AND USING THE AREA'S DENSE VEGETATION TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. NOTWITHSTANDING THE LIMITED SUCCESS OF THE MOP-UP OPERATION, OPERATION "SEVENTH OF AUGUST" IS THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY'S BIGGEST SUCCESS AGAINST THE FARC IN THE PAST TWO YEARS. END SUMMARY.

OPERATIONAL RESULTS

3. (C) AS REPORTED REFTELS, ON AUGUST 17, THE COLMIL LAUNCHED A MAJOR JOINT ARMY/AIR FORCE OPERATION AIMED AT DESTROYING MOBILE FARC UNITS WHICH HAD EARLIER LEFT THE FARC "DEMILITARIZED ZONE" TO ATTACK MILITARY TARGETS IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF META AND GUAVIARE. THE FARC UNITS WERE UNDER DIRECT ORDERS TO RETAKE THE TOWN OF BARRANCOMINAS (GUAINIA DEPARTMENT), LOST TO THE COLMIL DURING OPERATION "GATO NEGRO." ESTIMATES ARE THAT THE FARC SUFFERED 150 KILLED IN COMBAT, THE LARGEST NUMBER OF FARC KILLED IN AN OPERATION IN RECENT HISTORY. FURTHERMORE, INTELLIGENCE SOURCES INDICATE THAT APPROXIMATELY 30 FARC COMBATANTS SURRENDERED FOLLOWING THE COLMIL'S INITIAL BATTLEFIELD SUCCESSES.

4. (C) ACCORDING TO MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE SOURCES, FOLLOWING ITS EARLY BATTLEFIELD SETBACKS, THE FARC FORCE WAS ABLE TO SPLIT INTO GROUPS OF 50-300, WHICH HAVE LARGELY SUCCEEDED IN RETREATING INTO THE SURROUNDING JUNGLE AND WORKING THEIR WAY BACK TO THE "DESPEJE." THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE CONTINUE CONDUCTING RECONNAISSANCE AND PURSUIT OPERATIONS IN AN EFFORT TO

LOCATE AND DESTROY SOME OF THESE SMALLER GROUPS. ACCORDING TO ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL JORGE MORA, HE HAS APPROXIMATELY 750 TROOPS IN BLOCKING POSITIONS TO INTERCEPT THE FARC COLUMNS SEEKING TO RETURN TO THE "DESPEJE." ALTHOUGH THE INITIAL ENGAGEMENTS LED TO HEAVY FARC LOSSES, THE MOP-UP OPERATION HAS SO FAR HAD ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS AND WILL NOT LIKELY YIELD THE LARGE NUMBER OF FARC DESERTIONS THAT THE MILITARY WAS ORIGINALLY PREDICTING.

FARC FIELD MORALE LOW

15. (C) THE COLMIL'S SEIZURE OF AT LEAST EIGHT TONS OF RATIONS DESTINED FOR THE FARC COMBATANTS, THE FARC'S INABILITY TO ACHIEVE ITS GOAL TO RETAKE BARRANCOMINAS AND REESTABLISH A MAJOR DRUGS/WEAPONS CENTER ON THE BRAZILIAN BORDER, AND THE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AIR TO GROUND ATTACKS CARRIED OUT BY THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE HAVE, ACCORDING TO CAPTURED FARC GUERRILLAS, KEPT FARC FIELD MORALE VERY LOW. THE ARMY HAS REPOSITIONED ITS TROOPS INTO BLOCKING POSITIONS TO CUT OFF THE FARC'S ROUTES OF RETREAT TO THE "DESPEJE," AND CONTINUES TO HOPE TO CAPTURE OR KILL GUERRILLAS AS THEY FLEE THE COMBAT ZONE. THIS MOP-UP PHASE IS EXPECTED TO END IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS.

COMMENT

16. (C) THIS OFFENSIVE REFLECTS THE TACTICAL IMPROVEMENTS THAT THE COLMIL HAS MADE OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS. INTELLIGENCE WAS VITAL TO LOCATING THE FARC COLUMN, AND THE COLMIL WAS ABLE TO EXPLOIT THAT INTELLIGENCE BY MAKING USE OF ITS VASTLY IMPROVED TRANSPORT CAPABILITIES, DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE C-130 MAINTENANCE PROGRAM CONTINUES TO BE PLAGUED BY A SHORTAGE OF PARTS AND SKILLED MECHANICS. TWO YEARS AGO, EVEN IF INTELLIGENCE HAD PROVIDED THE NECESSARY INFORMATION, THE COLMIL WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MOVE OVER 3,000 TROOPS IN 48 HOURS TO THE COMBAT ZONE, AND THE FARC WOULD HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY ESCAPED.

17. (C) AT ONE TIME, THE COLMIL WAS HOPEFUL THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF TRAPPED FARC GUERRILLAS WOULD TURN THEMSELVES IN, AS HAD OCCURRED LATE LAST YEAR DURING OPERATION BERLIN. IN THIS CASE, THE DIFFICULT TERRAIN ALLOWED MOST OF THE GUERRILLA UNITS TO EVADE CONTACT WITH THE MILITARY AND THUS RETURN SAFELY TO THE "DESPEJE." ALTHOUGH LARGE SCALE DESERTIONS ARE UNLIKELY, OPERATION "SEVENTH OF AUGUST" IS, BY ANY MEASURE, ONE OF THE COLMIL'S BIGGEST MILITARY SUCCESSES IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. THIS OPERATION WILL LIKELY REINFORCE THE TREND OF THE FARC REVERTING TO HIT-AND-RUN TACTICS AND AVOIDING FRONTAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH NUMERICALLY SUPERIOR GROUND TROOPS BACKED BY SUPERIOR FIREPOWER.

PATTERSON

>